

APPROVED

TOWN OF WESTFORD

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

MINUTES

DATE: November 10, 2003

TIME: 7:30 P.M.

PLACE: J.V. Fletcher Library

PRESENT: Christopher Romeo, Robert Jefferies, Allan Loiselle,
Dini Healy-Coffin, James Silva

OTHERS

PRESENT: Steve Ledoux-Town Manager

Open Forum

There was no input from the Board or the audience.

Licenses and Permits

Request for a One-Day Beer & Wine License – Parish Center for the Arts, Sunday, November 16, 2003, 4:00-9:00 p.m. – **It was moved by Jefferies, seconded by Loiselle, and VOTED UNANIMOUSLY, to approve.**

Tax Classification Hearing FY 2004

Diane Holmes and Titus Palmer, Board of Assessors, and Paul Plouffe, Principal Assessor, were present. Plouffe made a presentation regarding the FY 2004 Data and Historical Data; Discussion of Data Relative to Single Tax Rate; Discussion of Data Relative to Split Tax Rate; Discussion of Data Relative to Residential Exemption; Discussion of Data Relative to Small Commercial Exemption. Plouffe stated that the overall increase in total valuation excluding new growth was approximately 9% over the total FY03 values. There has been an increase of 34 new single family dwelling units added this fiscal year.

Peter Mahler, 25 Vine Brook Road, was opposed to the split tax rate. Mahler pointed out that this has been a very tough year for the small business owner. Mahler felt that the small business owner needed to be treated fairly.

Lenny Palmer, Colonial Drive, stated that he was attending this meeting because there were no residents present at the tax classification hearing last year. Palmer stated that it has also been a very tough year for unemployed homeowners. Palmer stated that the Selectmen represent the taxpayers.

Loiselle stated that Westford is seeing a decrease in the business levy and that as a taxpayer he did not want to pay more taxes. Loiselle felt that Westford needed to attract more business to town and encourage a business friendly environment.

Holmes pointed out that the Town of Chelmsford had a split tax rate a few years ago and went back to a single rate because they were losing business.

Mark Scolnick, Littleton Road, felt that this would be a bad time to shift the tax burden given the amount of building vacancies in Westford. Scolnick stated that landlords are trying creative ways of keeping tenants along Route 495. Scolnick asked the Board to not split the tax rate.

Romeo noted that the Assessors have indicated that there will not be a meaningful savings to the taxpayers without a large shift in the tax rate. Romeo stated that Westford is facing a large deficit and the town will need to pull together as a community. Romeo was in favor of a single tax rate. Loiselle stated that the increases the town saw last year was from taking on additional debt, i.e., new schools and police and fire facilities. Silva stated that businesses pay their fair share in taxes with fewer benefits. Silva was concerned that a split tax rate would drive off business. The Board was in favor of a single tax rate.

It was moved by Jefferies, seconded by Healy-Coffin, and VOTED UNANIMOUSLY, to maintain the Single Tax Rate.

It was moved by Jefferies, seconded by Silva, and VOTED UNANIMOUSLY, to not establish the Residential Exemption.

It was moved by Jefferies, seconded by Healy-Coffin, and VOTED 4 IN FAVOR WITH 1 OPPOSED (Silva), to establish the Small Commercial Exemption at a 10% maximum. Silva was concerned that large companies may be scared off by paying more taxes.

It was moved by Jefferies, seconded by Healy-Coffin, and VOTED UNANIMOUSLY, to not establish an Open Space Exemption.

Adjournment

It was moved by Healy-Coffin, seconded by Jefferies, and VOTED UNANIMOUSLY, to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

Steve Ledoux, Town Manager

Christopher Romeo, Chairman